



AmeriCares Free Clinics

Providing quality health care to the uninsured

FALL/WINTER 2009

AmeriCares Free Clinics Celebrates 15 Years

Fifteen years ago this month, AmeriCares founder Bob Macauley realized his dream of starting a free clinic for uninsured Connecticut residents with the opening of the first AmeriCares Free Clinic in Norwalk.

“The two big hurdles were convincing doctors to donate their time and getting malpractice insurance,” said AmeriCares Free Clinics Executive Director Karen Gottlieb, who has been with the program since the beginning. “Skeptics thought we wouldn’t be able to recruit doctors and today we have physicians who have been with us for 15 years.”

One of the longest serving volunteers, Dr. Burt Rubin, said the need for a free clinic was obvious from the moment the doors opened. Many of the first patients he treated had been neglecting their chronic conditions far too long.

“During almost every session the first year I saw someone with some condition or severity that I could not imagine seeing in my private practice,” said Rubin, a Greenwich internist. “One day it was a woman whose goiter seemed to double the size of her neck;



AmeriCares photo archive

Longtime volunteer Dr. Sarojini Kurra examines a patient in 2001

another day it was a diabetic patient with blood sugar so high it did not register on the glucose meter.”

The program, which treated about 600 patients the first year, now serves nearly 3,000 patients annually at three locations.

The Norwalk clinic, which is still in its original, rent-free location in the South Norwalk Community Center, began with volunteer doctors and nurses providing primary care services for adults. A continuity care clinic for patients with chronic illnesses began in 1995 and pediatric services were added in 1996. Specialty clinics including women’s health and pulmonary care followed.

Norwalk Hospital has been a partner since the program’s inception, offering AmeriCares Free Clinics patients free X-rays and emergency room visits on a limited basis. In 1998, the hospital began offering a wider range of diagnostic testing to better serve our patients. Quest Diagnostics began donating free laboratory services in 1995.

When the Norwalk clinic opened, nearly 300,000 state residents were uninsured – a number that’s increased only slightly over the years.

“There was a need for our services then, and there’s still a need now,” Gottlieb said.



Photo by Mary Alice Fisher

Volunteer Pat Porio, R.N., consults with patients in 2005

Volunteers with 15 Years of Service

Albert Burke, M.D.

Robert Lindberg, M.D.

Jack Falsone, M.D.

Burt Rubin, M.D.

Stella Korchinski, R.N.

Grace Vetter, R.N.



Karen's Corner

Dear Friends,

There is much talk these days about the uninsured and health care reform, but for the AmeriCares

Free Clinics this issue is not new; in fact it is 15 years old. This November marks the 15th anniversary of the opening of our first free clinic in Norwalk and the start of our program. Over the years we have provided care for thousands of our low-income neighbors who would otherwise depend on the emergency room for their health care or worse still, let their symptoms go untreated.

This milestone would not have been possible without the dedication, compassion and expertise of our incredible staff. During the past year, as patients flooded our doors just as the economy forced us to cut back on staffing and salaries, I came to admire their dedication on a whole new level. We have talented, experienced employees who have many employment options, even in this economic environment, and yet they stood by us, putting in longer hours and taking on more responsibilities to weather this storm.

So with profound thanks and the utmost respect, I take my hat off to the staff members who so valiantly help the ever growing number of uninsured residents and support the volunteers who keep our clinics running. For our staff it's not just a job; it's a passion. It is truly a relief to have clinic directors all with over 10 years of service, lovingly and expertly watching over volunteers and patients alike.

With appreciation,

Karen Gottlieb, R.N., M.B.A.
Executive Director
AmeriCares Free Clinics

Protecting Patients from Swine Flu



AmeriCares staff photo

Volunteer nurse practitioner Anne Fenn gives a young patient the nasal H1N1 vaccine at the Norwalk clinic.

As part of AmeriCares Free Clinics participation in the state's vaccine program, our clinics began immunizing patients with the H1N1, also known as swine flu, vaccine in early October. The first round of vaccines was given to children ages 2 to 4, caregivers of children younger than 6 months, and hospital and ambulance workers, in accordance with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention guidelines.

AmeriCares Free Clinics, which received 100 doses of the nasal spray from the state, will continue to administer the vaccine to patients in the order of priority set forth by the federal government. Seasonal flu vaccines will also be available to patients.



Norwalk • Danbury • Bridgeport

Calling All Volunteers!

Are you interested in giving back to your community?

We need volunteers at all clinic locations in all roles!

MDs • APRNs • RNs • MAs • EMTs
Screeners • Interpreters in Spanish and Portuguese

Contact: Terri McCartney, Associate Director
tmccartney@AmeriCares.org • (203) 658-9592

www.AmeriCaresFreeClinics.org

Connecticut Officials Tour Norwalk Clinic

With health care reform at the top of the national agenda, U.S. Senator Christopher Dodd and U.S. Representative Jim Himes, both representing Connecticut, recently toured our Norwalk clinic to learn more about the health care needs of the uninsured.

Dodd, a member of the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee and a leader in the universal health care debate, toured the Norwalk clinic in August. He spoke to staff, volunteers and patients who depend on the clinic for their health care.

Dodd, who only the day before announced he was diagnosed with prostate cancer, spoke about his own health and his concern for the unemployed and the working poor who cannot afford the health plans offered by their employers.



Congressman Jim Himes chats with Norwalk clinic volunteers Dr. Sarah Gamble (center) and Ann Bello, R.N. (left)



Senator Christopher Dodd meets with volunteers Grace Vetter, R.N., (left) and Marleni Milla (center)

OdysseyRe Commits \$1 Million to AmeriCares Free Clinics

Odyssey America Reinsurance Corp. (OdysseyRe) has made a \$1 million commitment to our Norwalk and Bridgeport clinics. Stamford-based OdysseyRe, a leading worldwide underwriter of property and casualty reinsurance and insurance, has pledged \$200,000 a year for the next five years for general operating support. More than 98 percent of the AmeriCares Free Clinics budget is privately funded by generous individuals, foundations and corporations like OdysseyRe.

“We are thrilled to have a corporation that cares so deeply about helping the uninsured, especially in this economy when so many new patients are coming through our doors,” said AmeriCares Free Clinics Executive Director Karen Gottlieb. “Knowing we have the support of OdysseyRe for the next five years, we can plan ahead to ensure we have the programs and services our patients need to stay healthy.”

The \$1 million is in addition to \$325,000 OdysseyRe donated to the free clinic program in recent years. The company has also supported AmeriCares humanitarian relief work both in the United States and across the world.



OdysseyRe Vice President Patricia Robinson presents a \$200,000 check to AmeriCares Free Clinics Executive Director Karen Gottlieb

How We Helped the Uninsured Last Year

AmeriCares Free Clinics staff and volunteers managed nearly 9,000 patient visits last year – 1,000 more than the previous year due to increased demand.

	Norwalk	Danbury	Bridgeport	Total
Active Patients	1,163	1,212	536	2,911
New Patients	584	487	354	1,425
Patient Visits	3,224	3,768	1,988	8,980
Value of Services Provided	\$1.2 M	\$2 M	\$964,000	\$4.2 M



Headquarters
88 Hamilton Avenue
Stamford, CT 06902
1 (800) 486-HELP
www.AmeriCaresFreeClinics.org

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**Weisman AmeriCares Free Clinic
of Bridgeport**

115 Highland Avenue
Bridgeport, CT 06604
(203) 333-9175

**Boehringer Ingelheim AmeriCares
Free Clinic of Danbury**

76 West St.
Danbury, CT 06810
(203) 748-6188

AmeriCares Free Clinic of Norwalk

98 South Main St.
Norwalk, CT 06854
(203) 899-2493

A Patient's Story: Roger

Roger, a 41-year-old musician born and raised in Norwalk, ignored vision problems and a bulging chin for more than a year, hoping they would go away. He attributed his enlarged chin to weight gain; the eye problems he figured were a symptom of Lyme disease.

Then, as he was driving on the highway one night in July 2008, all he could see was a colorful blur from the lights ahead. He knew something was terribly wrong.

For two weeks he wore an eye patch. When his vision didn't improve, he went to an immediate care center to have it checked out. After spending \$400 for a blood test that yielded no indication of what was ailing him, Roger, who did not have health insurance, went to the AmeriCares Free Clinic in Norwalk for help. One of the volunteer doctors diagnosed him with a softball-sized goiter and referred him to Norwalk Hospital for a MRI.

"The doctor called and said, 'You should admit yourself to a hospital immediately,'" Roger recalled. "It was thyroid cancer and it had already spread throughout my body. A tumor at the base of my skull was pressing on a nerve, which caused my vision problems."



Roger performing this summer with his band

In November 2008, Roger had his thyroid removed. Radioiodine treatments and radiation followed.

"This thing was coming down the pike – and it was winning – but we caught it in the nick of time," he said.

Now, more than a year later, Roger is still undergoing treatment – and showing promising results.

"My vision is still impaired and I still can't sing lead, but there's hope," Roger said. "AmeriCares saved my life and that's the bottom line. You guys expedited my care to the next level. What you do for people like me is a miracle."



The mission of AmeriCares Free Clinics is to provide quality health care to uninsured residents in a setting where all individuals are treated with dignity and respect. The intention of AmeriCares Free Clinics is to help those who are making a sincere effort to help themselves and their families, but who do not have the financial resources for medical care.